

Springfield Conservation Nature Center

Idea Gathering Stage

Public Input Summary



Missouri Department of Conservation
February 2014



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) is seeking public input as we develop and revise conservation area management plans.
- Springfield Conservation Nature Center is a 79-acre conservation area within the Springfield city limits. Outside, visitors explore 79 acres of habitat on nearly 3 miles of trails. Inside, visitors experience the self-guided exhibit area, attend public programs, get their conservation questions answered, pick up brochures, purchase hunting/fishing permits and browse through a nature-related gift shop.
- MDC conducted a public involvement idea gathering phase (January 1-31, 2014) to gather input as staff begin to develop a 10-year management plan for Springfield Conservation Nature Center.
- During this time period (January 1-31, 2014), we heard comments from 31 respondents.
- Common themes heard during this idea gathering stage included concern about the overpopulation of white-tailed deer, concern about allowing running on trails, support for not allowing bicycles and pets on trails, and general support for the Nature Center and its activities.
- The Springfield Conservation Nature Center area planning team will take comments into consideration as they draft a 10-year area management plan. The draft plan will be available online (likely June 2014) for a month-long comment period at mdc.mo.gov/areaplans.

INTRODUCTION

Public Comment on Conservation Area Management Plans

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) wants to know what Missourians think about its nearly 1,000 conservation areas around the state. MDC is in the multi-year process of updating management plans for conservation areas and invites public comments. To preview draft management plans and share comments online, visit mdc.mo.gov/areaplans.

MDC conservation areas cover almost one million public acres for the purpose of restoring and conserving forest, fish and wildlife resources, and for providing opportunities for all citizens to use, enjoy and learn about these resources. Most Missourians are within a 30-minute drive of an MDC conservation area.

Missourians care about conservation and use conservation areas for many different reasons. These areas help people discover nature through various activities, and help make Missouri a great place to hunt, fish, and enjoy other outdoor activities. We want to know how conservation areas are important to Missourians. Encouraging public comments on Conservation Area Management Plans is part of MDC's ongoing efforts of working for and with Missourians to sustain healthy forests, fish and wildlife.

Conservation Area Management Plans focus on natural resource management and public use on conservation areas. The plans do not address regulations on hunting, fishing and other area uses, which are set by the Conservation Commission and enforced under the Wildlife Code of Missouri. MDC will consider all ideas received and will work to balance the issues and interests identified with the responsibility of managing areas for the present and future benefits to forest, fish, wildlife, and people. Decisions on which ideas to incorporate into area plans and on how to best incorporate them will be based on the property's purpose, its physical and biological conditions and capabilities, the best roles of the property in its local, regional and state-wide context, and on the professional expertise of MDC staff.

Questions? Please contact MDC Public Involvement Coordinator Amy Buechler at 573-522-4115 x3252, or amy.buechler@mdc.mo.gov.

Springfield Conservation Nature Center

The Springfield Conservation Nature Center is located within the city limits of Springfield, about a half-mile west of the intersection of US-60 and US-65. The facility and area opened to the public on October 7, 1988. The area consists of 79 acres, all in Greene County. The nature center is operated by the Outreach & Education Division and the Design and Development Section of the Administrative Services Division in the Missouri Department of Conservation.

Just under 53 acres are owned by MDC and approximately 27 acres are leased from City Utilities. The long-term lease is renewed every ten years at a cost of \$1.00. The second amendment to the lease agreement took place in November 2005. The next renewal of the lease is due before June 15, 2016.

The nature center building is open year-round 5 to 5 ½ days a week from 8am-5pm. (Closed Sunday and Monday Nov. 1 to Feb. 29 and closed Sunday mornings until noon and Mondays the remainder of the year.) The area and trails are opened daily from 8am-8pm March 1 through Oct. 31, and daily from 8am-6pm, Nov. 1 through Feb. 29. The entire area is closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Through a contract with a security company, the gates and outdoor restrooms are opened on Sunday mornings and opened and closed on state holidays that fall on a Monday. The facility is open on other state holidays including Independence Day.

The area is closed to pets, horses, hunting, fishing, collecting, littering, skateboards, rollerblades, fires, and alcohol beverages. Bicycles and motorized vehicles are restricted to paved roads. Visitors are required to remain on designated trails at all times. EPAMDs may be used by disabled visitors by a Special Permit process.

The area has been intensively managed for public use. Building visitation averages approximately 90,000 visitors and trail visitation averages 225,000 annually or approximately two-and-a-half times the building visitation. Interpretive programming has been provided to approximately 34,000 visitors annually who attend as many as 800 programs. About 90% of all on site programs include guided activities on the trail. The nature center attracts a high percentage of repeat visitors with many visitors walking the trails several times a week. According to a year-long visitor exit survey completed in 2011, the average party size is 1.8, they spend 1.4 hours on site, travel 13.3 miles to the facility, and visit 7 times a year. Besides using the trailhead on the nature center property, visitors also access the trails from the connection to the Ozark Greenways Trail system. This recreational trail adds an additional six miles of trail for visitors.

For its size, the Springfield Conservation Nature Center has an unusually diverse array of habitats including upland and bottomland forests, a limestone glade, a restored

woodland/savanna, a marsh, an 11-acre field being converted to bottomland prairie species, karst features (spring and losing stream), two intermittent streams, and water features including Galloway Creek and Lake Springfield. Natural community types include dry chert woodland, dry-mesic chert woodland and forest, dry limestone woodland, dry-mesic limestone woodland and forest, and mesic limestone forest.

Outside, visitors explore 79 acres of habitat on nearly 3 miles of trails. Inside, visitors experience the self-guided exhibit area, attend public programs, get their conservation questions answered, pick up brochures, purchase hunting/fishing permits and browse through a nature-related gift shop.

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) conducted a public involvement idea gathering phase (January 1-31, 2014) to gather input as staff begin to develop a 10-year management plan for Springfield Conservation Nature Center. The plan, once drafted, will be posted online (mdc.mo.gov/areaplans) for further public comment.

Conservation Area Management Plans focus on natural resource management and public use on conservation areas. The plans do not address regulations on hunting, fishing and other area uses, which are set by the Conservation Commission and enforced under the Wildlife Code of Missouri. MDC will consider all ideas received and will work to balance the issues and interests identified with the responsibility of managing areas for the present and future benefits to forest, fish, wildlife, and people.

Public Involvement

The idea gathering phase for development of the Springfield Conservation Nature Center area management plan ran from January 1-31, 2014. The objective of this phase was to inform stakeholders about area planning process and ask them to share their ideas.

- Developed posters and business cards about Springfield Conservation Nature Center idea gathering phase and displayed/distributed Nature Center, trailheads and at various events.
- Information and online comment form available at mdc.mo.gov/areaplans.
- News release sent to local media outlets.
- Announced comment period at all events at Nature Center, including Eagle Days (attended by 3,000).
- Sent letters or e-mails to: neighboring landowners, neighborhood associations, Springfield-Green County Park Board, Veteran's Cemetery, Bass Pro Shops, Dynamic Earth, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Burlington Northern/Santa Fe Railway, MoDOT, Ozark Greenways, local NGOs and businesses.

Next steps

The area planning team will take comments into consideration as they draft a 10-year management plan for Springfield Conservation Nature Center. The draft area management plan will be available online (likely June 2014) for a month-long comment period at mdc.mo.gov/areaplans. After that comment period, the plan will be finalized, and the final plan posted online.

DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY OF RESPONDENTS

Who responded?

Table 1. Total number of respondents commenting during the idea gathering phase (January 1-31, 2014) by respondent category.

Organization Type	Count
Individual citizens	21
NGOs (Greater Ozarks Audubon, Friends of the Garden, Missouri Master Naturalists, Ozark Greenways)	5
Springfield Conservation Nature Center Volunteer	2
Schools (Springfield Public School District, Westport K-8)	2
Local Government (Springfield-Greene County Park Board)	1
TOTAL	31

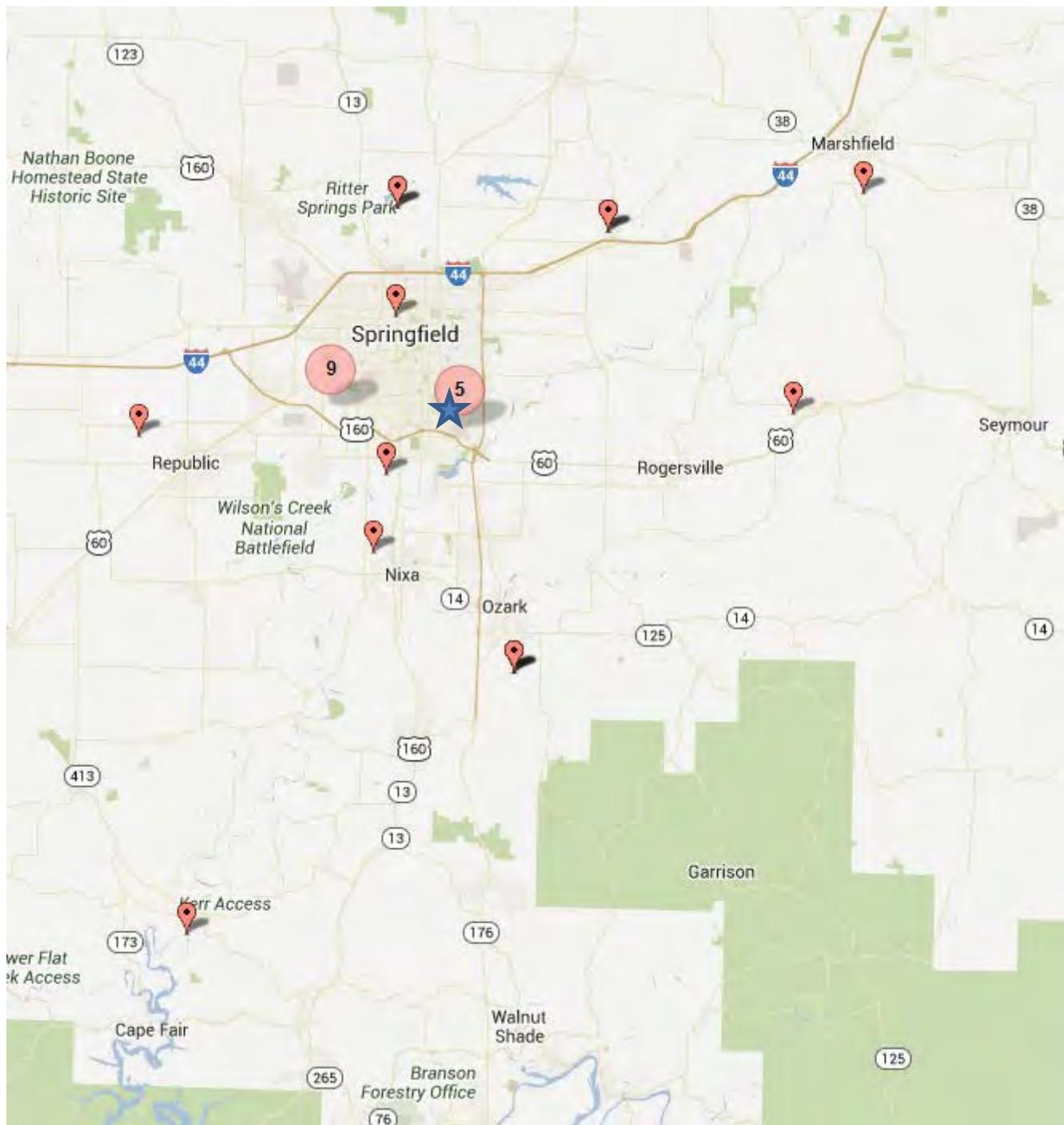
How they responded

Table 2. Total number of each response received.

Response Type	Count
Web Comment Form	18
Hard Copy Comment Form	13
TOTAL	31

Where respondents are from

Map of respondent locations by zip code. ⭐ = Springfield CNC Conservation Area
The pinpoints below represent the central point of zip codes from which a public comment was received (they do not represent actual street addresses). Not everyone who commented provided a zip code, so the total number is fewer than the number of comments received. Shaded circles with numbers show multiple responses from a single zip code.



THEMES AND ISSUES IDENTIFIED THROUGH SPRINGFIELD CONSERVATION NATURE CENTER IDEA GATHERING PHASE (January 1-31, 2014)

The Springfield Conservation Nature Center Idea Gathering Stage was available for a public idea gathering period January 1 – 31, 2014. The Missouri Department of Conservation received comments from 31 respondents. A brief summary of public input themes can be found below. The area planning team will take comments into consideration as they draft a 10-year management plan for Springfield Conservation Nature Center. The draft area management plan will be available online (likely June 2014) for a month-long comment period at mdc.mo.gov/areaplans. After that comment period, the plan will be finalized, and the final plan posted online.

Terrestrial Resource Management

- Concern about overpopulation of white-tailed deer and resulting damage to terrestrial habitats.
- Suggests more native plant displays.
- Suggests greater effort to control invasive species (Johnson grass, Bermuda grass, Japanese honeysuckle, bush honeysuckle).
- Suggests ongoing maintenance of Prothonotary warbler boxes, bluebird boxes, and wood duck boxes, as well as additional nest boxes added.
- Suggests using herbicide and prescribed fire to manage savanna.
- Suggests timber stand improvement with firewood donated to those in need (similar to Share the Harvest program).
- Appreciates that this area is a natural as opposed to park-like setting.

Aquatic Resource Management

- Suggests greater utilization of Lake Springfield for water activities.

Public Use Management

Trails

- Supports not allowing bicycles, skateboards or pets on trails.
- Suggests allowing bicycles and dogs on trails.
- Suggests interpretive signs on trails explaining different habitat types.
- Appreciates ability to run on the trails. Suggests expanding running times.
- Concern with allowing runners to use trails. Suggests closing trails to runners or creating a new running only trail that connects to greenways system and loops around the savanna.
- Concern about traffic noise on trails near the highway.

- Suggests trail connection from Galloway Greenway to Chrisman Road.
- Suggests placing more stone along trail edges.
- Concern with current trail widening and loss of native plants along trails.

Amenities

- Suggests having building open every day.
- Suggests providing a location to leave canoes temporarily while taking a walk.

Hunting

- Suggests allowing managed deer hunts to help control deer population.

Other

- Appreciates examples of many ecosystems for learning purposes.
- Suggests going to schools to give programs and/or creating a program where kids can earn badges.
- Suggests adding a children's garden, greenhouse, butterfly house.

Administrative Considerations

- Supportive of Nature Center, educational programs, and management plan.
- Suggests increasing number of staff at Nature Center to offer even more outdoor education and work with local partners.
- Suggests focus on sequestering carbon as a response to climate change.

“Wordle” visual summary of all comments received:



APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Springfield Conservation Nature Center Poster



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU



As the Nature Center celebrates its 25th year, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) is seeking visitor input to develop an Area Management Plan to guide the next 10 years.



Stop by the front desk to pick up a comment card or visit <mdc.mo.gov/areaplans> to submit comments online.

The plan will focus on land management and public use rather than on educational programs. The Nature Center is one of nearly 1,000 conservation areas owned or managed by MDC. These areas offer places to restore and conserve fish, forest, and wildlife resources and provide opportunity for citizens to use, enjoy, and learn about these resources. Conservation Areas are different than state or local parks that may place a greater emphasis on recreational activities.

Appendix 2. Springfield Conservation Nature Center Business Cards



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

As the Springfield Conservation Nature Center celebrates its 25th year, the Missouri Department of Conservation is seeking visitor input to develop an Area Management Plan to guide the next 10 years.

**Submit ideas or comments
online at
<mdc.mo.gov/areaplans>**



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Appendix 3. Springfield Conservation Nature Center Hard Copy Comment Form



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU



As the Springfield Conservation Nature Center celebrates its 25th year,
the Missouri Department of Conservation is seeking visitor input to
develop an Area Management Plan to guide the next 10 years.

Here's your opportunity to share your ideas and comments.

Name _____

Your email: _____

Organization affiliation (if any): _____

Complete mailing address: _____

Space on the back side for your written ideas and comments.

**Please return your completed comment
form to the front desk or mail it to:**

Springfield Conservation
Nature Center
4601 S Nature Center Way
Springfield MO 65804-4920



You can also share your ideas online at:
mdc.mo.gov/areaplans



over →



We hope to hear from a broad range of public interests and will listen to and consider all ideas for improving this area. Decisions on which ideas to incorporate into the Area Management Plan and on how to best incorporate them will be based on the property's purpose, its physical and biological conditions and capabilities, available financial and staffing resources, the professional expertise of Department staff, and on the best role of the property in its local, regional and statewide context.

Your ideas and comments: _____

Stay In touch:

- Yes, email me with progress of this Area Management Plan.
- Yes, email me updates on other Missouri Department of Conservation Area Management Plans as they are posted.



Appendix 4. Comments received via online or hard copy comment form during Springfield Conservation Nature Center Idea Gathering Phase (January 1-31, 2014).

No suggestions at this time. You are doing a great job. I just wanted to say that everyone should be encouraged to use their computer to find things. We see new and different animals in our yard and immediately go to the computer to look it up by putting in the description of the animal. And we always try to take pictures. Then we know what we have experienced and can share with others. Like today, we have two Eastern Meadowlarks feeding on the ground in our yard. We used the computer and described the yellow belly, broad black V on the chest and long thin beak. We took pictures as they sit on our fence. Then we went to your website to see what other info you may have on these beautiful birds (*Sturnella Magna* as we now know them). If there is a quicker way to do a look-up please feel free to tell us and we will use it. Thank you for all you do. Your friends in Nixa.

The single biggest management concern at the nature center is the significant damage being done to the terrestrial habitats by an overpopulation of white-tailed deer. The deer herd looks like it needs significant reduction. I know this isn't news, but the complexity of managing a deer herd for an 80-acre property surrounded by habitat MDC doesn't own, all within the city limits of Springfield, has led to inaction that has, in turn, led to a reduction of ground cover, a decrease in recruitment of new trees and shrubs, and a loss of plant species diversity. All of that is visible to the naked eye. I suspect there has also been a loss of ground-nesting forest birds, and probably changes in populations of terrestrial mammals, reptile, and amphibians. It is past time to come up with a strategy to deal with this problem. Since almost any strategy based on a deer harvest will run into (irrational) local opposition, MDC should begin laying the educational and public relations groundwork now, even before the exact management strategy is carried out.

Besides visiting the buildings, I drive past the Springfield lake area with the trails on 65. There could be more native plant areas or at least a little more diversity than what is there now. The median area had a nice display if it wasn't wiped out by the road construction.

I love the nature center the way it is. Please keep it in a natural state and resist the temptation to turn it into a city park setting. It is a great place to walk and view wildlife without worrying about bicyclists, skateboarders, dog-walkers, or runners (although runners are sometimes a problem.) It wish the building was open every day as I feel safer walking the trails when I know staff people are at least nearby.

As a school group who utilizes the Nature Center frequently to teach the conservation of Missouri ecosystems, we find the NC to be an integral part of our place-based, conservation science curriculum. Therefore, our first priority would be to encourage the organization to maintain the high-quality status quo of product and service they are currently providing. Beyond that, one of the greatest advantages of the property is that it contains "textbook" examples of all the Missouri ecosystems we teach about during the year: water, karst, forest, glade, wetland, prairie, savannah, etc. To be able to experience all of these in one place is huge for us. Perhaps interpretive signs on the trail, directly pinpointing these areas and explaining their unique flora and fauna, could even further leverage their value for educators.

Hard copy (01/07/2014) We feel you have done a great job with the Nature Center. We are pleased with the way it is kept up and run. The only thing we are concern with is the number of deer. We enjoy watching the deer. Other folks drive out here to see the deer. This creates a problem of temptation to shoot the deer. Evidence--a young man was encountered very early one morning in our backyard - looking for his arrow and a deer taht might have been shot saying the conservation said he could have the deer if he found it. He was advised to leave. Just recently we found an arrow in our tree - shot toward our house--this is not good or safe. We would be very interested in what could be done to control the number of deer.

Westport K-8 is a new school with a new emphasis on developing a child from Kindergarten to eighth grade. Wouldn't it be a good idea to offer a range of classes for younger to teen and then follow them through the years? In a ten year period, you can take an infant to fourth grade. Then keep going from there to high school. We must create a generation that cares about nature. My students rarely get that modeled at home so more availability of someone to bring nature to the school library would be welcomed and used. I know it is not the same as being in your area but some of my students would never experience nature without your help. Maybe even create a model similar to scouts where badges are "earned" from knowledge gained. Would be something children could share with others and build on too.

Thanks for the opportunity to provide input.

Our board discussed the nature centerat our last meeting on January 14. We would like to raise the following areas of concern, in order of priority:

1. Running interferes with individuals using the Nature Center for its taxpayer intended and supported purpose, namely observation of and education about nature. Many more trails in Springfield are available to runners now than when the Nature Center first opened. It should not be a hardship on the running community to close the trails to running, just as they are closed to biking.
2. Deer overpopulation is degrading the natural vegetation.
3. The habitat also needs improved control of invasive species, including Bermuda grass, Japanese honeysuckle and bush honeysuckle.
4. Traffic noise from the adjacent highway significantly degrades the experience on the trails on the eastern border of the Nature Center.
5. We would like to continue to see the Prothonatory warbler boxes, bluebird boxes and woodduck boxes maintained, and additional nestboxes added where appropriate.

I would like to see three issues addressed at the SCNC:

1. Ban running & fitness focused activities from the nature center property OR limit it to only one particular area. The purpose of nature centers is nature education and the observation/enjoyment of nature. I have been bulldozed too many times by runners

disconnected to nature, listening to headphones, distracted by fitness monitors running right over the top of people on the trails. I believe that this fundamentally conflicts with the purpose of the nature center. Perhaps a new running only trail could be constructed connecting to the greenways trail system that makes a loop around the savannah area only, and runners could have that circuit to themselves. The remainder of the property could then revert to nature observation and education only.

2. Overpopulation of white-tail deer. The deer herd at the nature center is out of control and an obvious browse line exists. Damage to native plants is occurring and managed hunts should be offered to take this population back to a reasonable level.

3. Removal of invasive species. The savannah area in the bottom has been taken over by Johnson grass. Non-native honeysuckle is overgrowing the forested areas in many places. The nature center should be a focus and example of nature-scaping not a repository for non-native invasive species. The savannah should be managed with herbicide and prescribed burns and returned to natural state.

Thanks for this opportunity.

I would like to see you address the overpopulation of deer and the number of invasive species. The Nature Center is a definite asset to our community. Thank you for your continued work.

Work in partnership to make a neighborhood trail connection from Galloway Greenway to Chrisman Road.

Add staff to offer even more outdoor education and net work on the ground with local partners.

Utilize Lake Springfield greater with on the water activities....promote the James River Water Trail and the James River corridor as an extension of the Nature Center.

Hi,

I would like to see the Nature Center sequester carbon. I believe one could also be a steward and meet your social goals that you have for Missouri residents while you're sequestering carbon. I feel like we humans have designed ourselves into Climate Change, therefore, we can design our way out of it.

Take care,
Richard Herman

I appreciate the balance the MDC maintains between environmental and people needs taking a common sense and rational approach to conserving natural resources while offering opportunities for people to enjoy and interact with our native Missouri.

I also appreciate the goodwill and partnership the MDC offers and has displayed to other local agencies whose missions intersect especially in the area of public education.

I believe the challenge before us for the future is to engage each generation in understanding and respecting our native environment. The goal would be to impact their learning in such a way that the necessity of healthy ecosystems are understood and are relevant to them.

(Hard copy 1/21/2014) This place is fantastic; we love it. I love running and walking the trails. Love all the nature as we are on them!! My daughter loves the indoor exhibits and the friendly people here.

(Hard copy 1/21/2014) Really enjoyed the owls and partnership with zoo birds--owls and eagles. Any other animals would be great.

(Hard copy 1/21/2014) Owl program was great!! Thank you.

(Hard copy 1/21/2014) Love your programs. Esp kids.

(Hard copy 1/21/2014) I loved the program and would love to see other large birds of prey. Also, time afterward to ask questions would be fantastic!

(Hard copy 1/21/2014) Love the nature center. It adds so much to our area.

(Hard copy 1/21/2014) Please include an area for canoes to be dropped off @ nc. People can drop off their canoe, then go for a walk, then get back in their canoe. Change running times to allow running from 4-6pm on weekdays.

(Hard copy 1/21/2014) The Eagle Days are amazing for all ages. This is our second year here.

(Hard Copy 1/21/2014) It is my hope that the #1 complaint of nature and birding loving users of the trail can be successfully addressed: runners!

(Hard copy 1/21/2014) Interactive garden, children's garden, greenhouse, butterfly house, bird house/bat house building classes.

(Hard copy 1/21/2014) No comments made.

I think you all do a wonderful job managing the diverse ecosystems on the nature center property. I appreciate being able to come there and see healthy examples of forests, glades, and prairies right in the city. Examples of healthy forests are particularly important because so much of what is left of our urban forest along the greenway trails in the rest of the City appears to be so overtaken with invasive species. I don't have any specific comments, but rather a general comment that the plan should focus on continuing to maintain and/or improve the health of these ecosystems as needed. The various aquatic ecosystems on the property are also unique. While the health of those is greatly influenced by the upstream watershed, if there is work that needs to be done to maintain or improve those areas, I would be greatly supportive of that as well.

I would really like to see all runners stop using the Nature Center. There are many other good nearby trails to use now. Running is not consistent with the purpose of education. If a family is watching wildlife and a runner comes roaring by, that scares away the wildlife. I think the trails are for observing nature in a quiet way. Runners often are very demanding/rude. I would like MDC to post signs that running is no longer allowed at SCNS, and then issue a few tickets by a conservation agent when that is ignored. The word would get around really fast and I think the running would stop.

My comment is mine alone and not that of the Park Board or Ozark Greenways.

Have you considered changing policy to allow runners, bicycles and/or dogs on leashes on the trails at the Conservation Center? It's a comment I hear often from users of the adjacent Galloway Creek Greenway.

The Timber Stand is in need of a maintenance cut, and parts of it may need some timber harvested. This will help prevent attrition and blow overs caused by over crowding. It will also help prevent a wild fire. The mature timber could be donated for area youth groups and high school wood shops. Some of it could even help finance the improvement cut. The fire wood could be donated to the needy in like manner as the "Share the Harvest" program does with game meats. I believe the most aesthetic logging practice for the proposed cut would be performed with horses and not mechanized logging. Some repairs need to be done with the water shed as well, the creeks and hills along with the trails have signs of compromise. Planting native grasses, and planting complimentary under brush type plants can help hold the top soil better and prevent erosion. It will also provide forage and habitat for the animals. Placing more stone along trail edges will help maintain the transition between the soil and the trails. Not all of the dead and downed trees should be removed; some of it needs to be left for animal dens and plant life diversity, as well as animal diet. The over all benefit of the improvement cut and water shed protections will include strengthening the total tree stand, let sun light into the forest floor to promote wild flowers, invite song birds, provide deer and animal forage and habitat, as well as protecting the aquatic life in the water holding areas.

SCNC is one of the true gems of the Ozarks for the citizens of Springfield and the surrounding area.

In this time of continued rapid population growth with businesses, highways and housing developments expanding all around us, the Nature Center is a sanctuary for both humans desiring to commune with nature and a habitat for the four legged critters and bird life which resides on the small acreage preserved here.

As a person who both visits the trails and is a volunteer at the NC it is my hope that no changes are made to the Area Management Plan which would take away from the nature experience one may have on this small treasure of land in the heart of the city.

As an example, I visit the Lake Springfield Park several times a week. In the past several months I have witnessed the clearing of wooded areas, the cutting of very large trees making it so groomed it is losing its appeal to those of us who enjoy the natural setting and for the

wildlife which is more and more being crowded out to make room for the persons using the land. It feels as though the land is being groomed so that it will be easier to take care of by the caretakers, and less a natural setting. Or as some have said, the forester has to justify his keep by cutting so many trees to prove his worth.

Each time an "enhancement" is made to the trails at the Nature Center - wild flower areas are displaced, and habitat for the birds and other wild critters is destroyed.

So please, no skateboard paths, cross country runners, bicycles, etc, There are many other areas in our city which can accommodate these activities and very few areas left which fulfill the desires of the nature lovers.

What fun it is to happen on pileated woodpeckers, turkeys, deer, witness the seasonal migrations of birds and waterfowl, see a log full of turtles sunning on a warm day, watch a great blue heron fish in the waterlands and see the first harbingers of spring along the paths.

Please - If it ain't broke don't fix it.

(Hard copy mailed and rec'd anonymously 2/01/2014)I am concerned about the loss of wildflowers and other native plants when the trails are widened. On Sycamore cutoff there were many woodland wildflowers when the nature center first opened. They are mostly gone now. Why do the trails have to be widened?

(Hard Copy - 02/03/2014) Wonderful interpretive programs; fascinating outside speakers; always interesting Eagle Days, Owl Prowl, bird walks, hikes, orienteering. Keep up the good work!!